

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1302

INFO USCINCSO

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 3 PANAMA 2303

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINR, AMGT, PFOR, PN

SUBJECT: ANNUAL POLICY AND RESOURCE ASSESSMENT PANAMA-PARM-
PART 1

REF: STATE 38356

1. A. U.S. INTERESTS. THE PREDOMINANT LONG-TERM INTEREST
OF THE U.S. IN PANAMA IS THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF A CANAL
THAT IS ADEQUATELY DEFENDED, EFFICIENTLY OPERATED AND UNCON-
DITIONALLY AVAILABLE TO THE U.S. AT REASONABLE TOLLS AND ON
A NONDISCRIMINATORY BASIS. ACHIEVEMENT OF THIS GOAL WILL
CONTRIBUTE SUBSTANTIALLY BOTH TO U.S. ECONOMIC PROSPERITY
AND TO BROADER U.S. SECURITY OBJECTIVES. THIS INTEREST IS
INTIMATELY ASSOCIATED WITH OUR INTERESTS THROUGHOUT THE
HEMISPHERE AND INDEED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD. SATISFACTORY
RESOLUTION OF THE CANAL PROBLEM IS THE FIRST HURDLE IF WE
ARE TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL LATIN AMERICAN POLICY.

B. OVERVIEW. IN THE 1975 CASP, I BEGAN MY OVERVIEW
WITH THE STATEMENT THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN THE U.S. AND
PANAMA HAD "REACHED A DECISIVE FORK IN THE ROAD." ONE
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BRANCH OF THE FORK, I NOTED, LED TOWARD TREATY APPROVAL
AND RATIFICATION, WHILE THE OTHER LED TOWARD FAILURE.
UNFORTUNATELY, IN THE TWO YEARS SINCE I ORIGINALLY MADE
THIS STATEMENT, WE HAVE NOT MADE MAJOR PROGRESS. WE
ARE STILL AT THE CRUCIAL CROSSROAD.

IT MAY BE THAT IN MARCH 1978, THE SAME THING WILL

HAVE TO BE SAID--BUT I DOUBT IT. EVENTS WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY PUSH US DOWN ONE PATH OR THE OTHER.

IT WE PROCEED TOWARD A SIGNED AND RATIFIED TREATY, RELATIONS BETWEEN THE U.S. AND PANAMA WILL STILL BE COMPLEX AND DIFFICULT, BUT FUNDAMENTALLY FRIENDLY AND HEALTHY. BUT IF THE TREATY TALKS BREAK DOWN, OR IF WE OR PANAMA FAIL TO OBTAIN TREATY RATIFICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION, RELATIONS WILL DETERIORATE QUICKLY. THERE WOULD PROBABLY BE VIOLENCE AGAINST U.S. CITIZENS AND INSTALLATIONS IN PANAMA AND THE ZONE.

THUS, THE FUTURE OF U.S.-PANAMA RELATIONS DEPENDS HEAVILY ON THE OUTCOME OF THE NEGOTIATIONS. THIS EMBASSY HAS DONE CONSIDERABLE CONTINGENCY PLANNING IN CASE OF A BREAKDOWN IN THE NEGOTIATIONS. BUT OUR PREMISE IN THIS REPORT IS THAT NEGOTIATIONS WILL BE CONCLUDED SUCCESSFULLY WITHIN THE PARM TIMEFRAME AND THAT RATIFICATION WILL EITHER BE ACHIEVED OR BE WELL ON THE DAY TO ACHIEVEMENT.

THERE IS GOOD REASON FOR THIS PREMISE. WE HAVE AGREED TO THE BASIC OUTLINES FOR A TREATY. THE REMAINING DIFFERENCES, WHILE NOT ALWAYS DETAILS, SEEM TO ME WELL WITHIN THE RANGE OF THE NEGOTIABLE--PROVIDED BOTH SIDES NEGOTIATE WITH FLEXIBILITY AND AN INTELLIGENT EYE COCKED ON THEIR BASIC NATIONAL INTERESTS.

NUMEROUS POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS WITHIN
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PANAMA WILL BEAR UPON THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT'S WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY TO COME TO A TREATY AGREEMENT WITH US. FIRST, IT MUST BE UNDERSTOOD THAT THE CHIEF OF GOVERNMENT, GENERAL OMAR TORRIJOS, WILL MAKE THE BASIC DECISIONS FOR PANAMA. HE IS A SHREWD MAN WITH A GOOD POLITICAL FEEL FOR HIS COUNTRY. BUT HE IS HIGHLY SUSPICIOUS OF U.S. INTENTIONS, OFTEN VOLATILE AND ERRATIC, AND GIVEN TO INDECISIVENESS IN TIMES OF STRESS.

PERHAPS THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THE INTERRELATED DOMESTIC FACTORS WHICH WILL AFFECT TORRIJOS' DECISIONS IS ECONOMIC. PANAMA'S ECONOMY HAS BEEN STAGNATING SINCE 1973, WITH ESSENTIALLY NO REAL GROWTH. THIS FOLLOWS NEARLY 15 YEARS OF SUSTAINED 8 PERCENT ANNUAL GROWTH. EXTERNAL AND DOMESTIC CONSTRAINTS HAVE LIMITED THE GOV'S RESOURCE BASE FOR GETTING THE ECONOMY MOVING OVER THE SHORT TO INTERMEDIATE TERM. RECESSION HAS RESULTED IN INCREASED UNEMPLOYMENT AND BUSINESS UNCERTAINTY.

TIED TO THIS GLOOMY ECONOMIC PICTURE IS THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT'S FISCAL SITUATION. WITH A STAGNANT ECONOMY AND A DEBT SERVICE WHICH RUNS ABOUT 30 PER CENT OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENT REVENUES, PANAMA HAS INTRODUCED AUSTERITY MEASURES AND CUT BACK ON SOME PLANS FOR PUBLIC SECTOR INVESTMENT. INTERNATIONAL BANKERS, CRUCIAL TO THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT'S BORROWING PLANS, HAVE BECOME MORE CAUTIOUS. THEY ARE WAITING EAGERLY TO SEE WHETHER A TREATY WILL MATERIALIZE. IF IT DOES, THEY WILL REGARD IT AS SYMBOLIZING CONTINUED CLOSE U.S.-PANAMANIAN COOPERATION OVER THE YEARS AHEAD. THAT, IN TURN, WOULD HAVE A SIGNIFICANTLY POSITIVE EFFECT IN IMPROVING CONFIDENCE AND CREATING A MORE FAVORABLE INVESTMENT CLIMATE. THESE SAME CONSIDERATIONS ACT AS A STIMULUS FOR THE PANAMANIAN TO MOVE QUICKLY TOWARD A TREATY. THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN IS THAT A BREAKDOWN IN NEGOTIATIONS WOULD HAVE DIRE CONSEQUENCES FOR PANAMA'S CREDITWORTHINESS-
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AND ULTIMATELY ON ITS CAPACITY TO MAINTAIN PUBLIC SPENDING AT CURRENT LEVELS.

AMONG THE AUSTERITY MEASURES RECENTLY TAKEN BY THE PANAMANIAN GOVERNMENT WERE A NEW 5 PER CENT CONSUMPTION TAX AND CHANGES IN THE LABOR CODE WHICH WERE STRONGLY OPPOSED BY ORGANIZED LABOR. THESE MEASURES, THOUGH COURAGEOUS AND PROBABLY NECESSARY, ARE LIKELY TO HAVE DEPRESSIVE AND UNPOPULAR EFFECTS ON THE ECONOMY IN THE SHORT TERM.

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FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1303
INFO USCINCSO

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THE MOST IMPORTANT POLITICAL FACTOR IN PANAMA IS
THE NATIONAL GUARD--PANAMA'S ONLY MILITARY FORCE. IT
APPEARS TO BE FIRMLY BEHIND TORRIJOS. BUT THERE IS A
POSSIBILITY THAT THIS SUPPORT COULD SOFTEN OR EVEN
FRACTURE IF SERIOUS POLITICAL TROUBLES ARISE.

THE ELEMENTS MOST ABLE TO CAUSE SERIOUS TROUBLE
ARE LEFT-WING STUDENTS. IN SEPTEMBER, STUDENT DEMON-
STRATIONS SERIOUSLY EMBARRASSED THE GOVERNMENT, BUT WERE
PUT DOWN WITHOUT DIFFICULTY. HOWEVER, IF STUDENTS (WHO
SEEM INCREASINGLY ANTI-GOVERNMENT) SHOULD GO TO THE
STREETS IN OPPOSITION TO THE GOVERNMENT, THEY MIGHT
FIND SUPPORT FROM WORKERS OR OTHER SECTORS. THE NA-
TIONAL GUARD PROBABLY COULD AND WOULD PUT DOWN DEMONSTRATIONS;
BUT IF THEY SHOULD BECOME VERY BLOODY, THE
PICTURE MIGHT CHANGE.

THIS POTENTIAL FOR INSTABILITY IN PANAMA IS AN
ESSENTIAL PART OF THE NEGOTIATING PICTURE. IF HE FELT
THREATENED, TORRIJOS MIGHT WELL TRY TO LAY THE BLAME
FOR HIS ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS ON THE U.S.
AND MIGHT EVEN BREAK OFF THE NEGOTIATIONS TO MAKE THE
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U.S. THE SCAPEGOAT FOR HIS WOES.

OUR POLICY IS TO NEGOTIATE RAPIDLY A FAIR TREATY;
THIS IS THE COURSE MOST LIKELY TO MAKE IT POSSIBLE FOR
TORRIJOS TO AGREE TO A TREATY THAT MEETS OUR REQUIRE-
MENTS. WE ARE NOT SURE HOW MUCH GOOD A TREATY WILL DO
TO THE PANAMANIAN ECONOMY. INCREASED COMPENSATION AND
THE OPPORTUNITY FOR BUSINESS INVESTMENT IN AREAS NEAR
THE CANAL WILL UNDOUBTEDLY GIVE THE ECONOMY A FILLIP;
BUT THIS MAY BE PARTIALLY OFFSET BY INCREASED GOV AD-
MINISTRATIVE COSTS AND DIMINISHED U.S. GOVERNMENT AND
PERSONNEL SPENDING IN PANAMA.

PANAMA'S DECISION TO DEFER DISCUSSION OF THE
COMPENSATION ISSUE UNTIL AGREEMENT HAS BEEN REACHED ON
DURATION AND A NEUTRALITY GUARANTEE WOULD NOT DETER
THE USG FROM EVALUATING PANAMA'S NEEDS, AS OPPOSED TO
HER DEMANDS, IN MAINTAINING A STABLE ECONOMY THAT WILL
FACILITATE HER PARTICIPATION IN THE EFFICIENT OPERATION
AND PROTECTION OF THE CANAL.

IN ANY EVENT, THE RECOVERY AND CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT OF THE PANAMANIAN ECONOMY ARE PREREQUISITES TO A HARMONIOUS PARTNERSHIP UNDER A NEW TREATY. PANAMA'S ECONOMY IS CLOSELY TIED TO THE UNITED STATES, NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF THE CANAL AND PANAMA'S DOLLAR-BASED FINANCIAL SYSTEM, BUT ALSO BECAUSE ABOUT 65 PER CENT OF ITS GDP FLOWS FROM THE SERVICE SECTORS. U.S. INVESTMENT HAS PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN PANAMA'S ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL EVOLUTION. PANAMA IS AN IMPORTANT TRADING PARTNER, WITH OVER ONE-THIRD OF ITS ANNUAL IMPORTS OF \$1 BILLION COMING FROM THE U.S.; IT IS A COMMERCIAL HUB INVOLVING THE CANAL, INTEROCEANIC SHIPPING, AND THE COLON FREE TRADE ZONE. PANAMA HAS BECOME THE MAJOR FINANCIAL CENTER FOR THE REGION AND IS THE LATIN AMERICAN BASE OF OPERATIONS FOR ABOUT 75 INTERNATIONAL BANKS WITH ALMOST \$10 BILLION

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IN DEPOSITS (INCLUDING, AMONG NEARLY 20 U.S. BANKS, BANK OF AMERICA, CITIBANK, CHASE, WELLS FARGO). THIS ROLE REINFORCES OUR INTEREST IN THE HEALTH OF THE ECONOMY AND ITS RECOVERY. THE CRITICAL GAP IN THE REVIVAL PROCESS IS 1977-1983-- A VITAL PERIOD FOR U.S.-PANAMANIAN ADJUSTMENT TO A CHANGED RELATIONSHIP UNDER A NEW TREATY. THIS PERIOD CAN PROVIDE US WITH A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR RELATING TO THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PANAMANIAN PEOPLE--ASSOCIATING US UNDER A NEW TREATY WITH THE SECOND MOST PERVASIVE THEME IN PANAMANIAN LIFE: THE WILL TO DEVELOP. DEBT RELIEF, ECONOMIC AID AND SPECIFIC PROJECTS PHYSICALLY INTEGRATING THE ZONE AND PANAMA ARE MEASURES WHICH MAY BE NEEDED TO HELP BRIDGE THIS GAP. CERTAINLY, INCREASED TRADE, INVESTMENT AND OTHER ECONOMIC ADVANTAGES FOR THE U.S. IN PANAMA DEPEND ULTIMATELY ON A NEW TREATY RELATIONSHIP AND THE STATE OF THE PANAMANIAN ECONOMY. THE CONCLUSION OF A NEW TREATY UNDOUBTEDLY WILL GIVE A PSYCHOLOGICAL LIFT TO THE ECONOMY. IN ADDITION, IT WOULD MOST SURELY CONTRIBUTE TO POLITICAL STABILITY HERE, AT LEAST FOR THE TIMEFRAME OF THIS PAPER.

C. OBJECTIVES AND COURSES OF ACTION.

OBJECTIVES (LISTED BY PRIORITY)

OBJECT 1.

A. THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH SHOULD EXPAND ITS EFFORTS TO INFORM THE CONGRESS AND THE U.S. PUBLIC OF THE IMPORTANCE OF ESTABLISHING A NEW TREATY RELATIONSHIP WITH PANAMA.

B. THE USG SHOULD MAINTAIN A BILATERAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AS EVIDENCE OF A CONTINUING COMMITMENT TO THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF PANAMA. THIS PROGRAM WILL CONTRIBUTE TO DEVELOPING PANAMA'S
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CAPACITY TO ASSUME A PARTNERSHIP ROLE IN OPERATING THE CANAL BY: (1) PROVIDING ASSISTANCE IN DEVELOPING THE HUMAN RESOURCES REQUIRED TO RUN THE CANAL, AND (2) CONTINUING ECONOMIC AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE INPUTS IN OTHER PARTS OF THE COUNTRY TO PROMOTE A MORE BALANCED DEVELOPMENT AND THUS COUNTERACT THE MIGRATION OF PEOPLE TO THE PANAMA CITY-COLON METROPOLITAN CORRIDOR.

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O R 311712Z MAR 77
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OBJECTIVE 2.

A. THE EMBASSY WILL CONTINUE EFFORTS TO DEFINE THE STATUS UNDER A NEW TREATY OF USG AGENCIES NOW OPERATING IN THE CANAL ZONE. WE WILL ALSO INITIATE A COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING EFFORT TO DEFINE AND EVALUATE ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES ACCRUING TO THE EMBASSY UNDER A NEW TREATY.

B. WE PROPOSE THAT THE DEPARTMENT UNDERTAKE CONCRETE PLANNING ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE USG PRESENCE HERE AS THE CANAL ZONE IS INTEGRATED INTO THE REPUBLIC OF PANAMA. UNDER LONG-STANDING GUIDANCE ON THE ROLE OF THE AMBASSADOR, MUCH OF THIS PRESENCE WILL BECOME A PART OF THE MISSION'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR OVERSIGHT AND COORDINATION. IN ADDITION TO LIAISON WITH THE U.S. MILITARY STATIONED IN PANAMA AND REQUIREMENTS IMPOSED BY TREATY IMPLEMENTATION AND CANAL OPERATION, THE EMBASSY WILL ALSO ASSUME A BROAD RANGE OF SERVICES (CONSULAR, ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT, ETC.) NOW PROVIDED IN THE CANAL ZONE. WASHINGTON AND THIS MISSION SHOULD WORK CLOSELY TOGETHER IN DEFINING THE DEMANDS A NEW
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TREATY WILL MAKE ON THE EMBASSY.

OBJECTIVE 3.

THE USG WILL ASSIST THE GOP IN IMPLEMENTING ITS 10-YEAR FORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FOR THE NATIONAL GUARD. OUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS PROGRAM SHOULD ENCOURAGE THE NG'S USE OF U.S. TRAINING FACILITIES AND WEAPONS SUPPLIERS, THUS MAINTAINING U.S. MILITARY INFLUENCE AND PROMOTING A FAVORABLE DISPOSITION TOWARD THE U.S. MILITARY IN THE NATIONAL GUARD.

OBJECTIVE 4.

A. THE USG SHOULD ASSIST PANAMA IN ATTEMPTS TO CLOSE ITS CHRONIC BALANCE OF PAYMENTS GAP--PARTIALLY FINANCED WITH DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE FUNDS--BY FACILITATING THE ENTRY OF PANAMANIAN PRODUCTS INTO U.S. MARKETS. THE EMBASSY IS ENCOURAGING PANAMA TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE EXPORT OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY GSP. LIKEWISE, WE SHOULD BE MORE FORTHCOMING IN OUR COMMODITY POLICIES AFFECTING PANAMA. SUCH RESPONSIVENESS WILL REINFORCE THE COOPERATION OF THE GOP THAT IS REQUISITE FOR THE JOINT U.S.-PANAMANIAN PROGRAM TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF FOOT-AND-MOUTH DISEASE FROM NORTHERN COLOMBIA INTO PANAMA, A PROGRAM CLOSELY LINKED TO THE COMPLETION OF THE DARIEN GAP HIGHWAY.

B. WE SHOULD MAKE AN EFFORT TO RESPOND TO THE SEVERE SHORT-TERM FINANCIAL PROBLEMS FACING THE GOP. USG ASSISTANCE MAY BE REQUIRED IN THE MAJOR RESCHEDULING OF EXTERNAL DEBT THAT WILL LIKELY BE NECESSARY IN THE NEXT 18 MONTHS. PANAMA MAY ALSO REQUEST A MORE LIBERAL EXIMBANK LENDING POLICY TO HELP MEET THE FINANCING NEEDS OF SEVERAL LARGE GOP DEVELOP-

MENT PROJECTS SCHEDULED TO BEGIN DURING THE PARM

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TIMEFRAME.

OBJECTIVE 5. CONTINUE U.S. -PANAMAMANIAN CO-
OPERATION IN CONTROLLING ILLICIT NARCOTICS BY PROVIDING
TRAINING FOR PERSONNEL IN THE GOP'S ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES.
WE WILL CONTINUE TO PRESENT USG CONCERNS ABOUT
DRUG TRAFFICKING TO APPROPRIATE GOP OFFICIALS. AN
INCREASED AWARENESS AT GOP POLICY-MAKING LEVELS OF THE
NEED FOR CONTROL PROGRAMS IS NECESSARY TO SUPPORT THE
HIGHER DEGREE OF PROFESSIONALISM, EXPANDED AND IMPROVED
INTELLIGENCE, TIGHTENED CUSTOMS PROCEDURES, AND
ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT REQUIRED FOR FURTHER PROGRESS IN
NARCOTICS CONTROL.

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